Japanese nuclear crisis level raised

Japan has raised the severity level at the Fukushima nuclear plant from 5 to 7 – the highest level on the International Nuclear Event Scale. The move places the crisis on a par with the 1986 Chernobyl disaster, the worst atomic power accident in history

7	Major release of radioactive material
6	Significant release of radioactive material
5	Limited release of radioactive material
4	Minor release of radioactive material with at least one death from radiation
3	Exposure in excess of 10 times statutory annual limit for workers
2	Exposure of one member of public in excess of 10 milliSieverts
1	Exposure of one member of public above statutory annual limit

7 Chernobyl, Ukraine, 1986: Reactor number four explodes after experiment. Resulting fire burns for nine days and releases at least 100 times more radiation than Hiroshima and Nagasaki bombings. **Fifty deaths directly attributed to accident – but IAEA estimates incident will ultimately claim around 4,000 deaths**

6 Kyshtym, Russia, 1957: Fault in cooling system at Mayak plant results in non-nuclear explosion of dried waste that releases up to 80 tonnes of radioactive materials. **Around 10,000 people evacuated after reports of people's skin melting off faces – at least 200 thought to have died**

5 Three Mile Island, U.S, 1979: Cooling malfunction at Pennsylvania plant causes partial meltdown in one reactor, resulting in release of small amount of radiation. **Around 140,000 people evacuated – no deaths or injuries reported**

5 Windscale, UK, 1957: Core of Britain's first nuclear reactor catches fire, releasing cloud of radioactive material into nearby countryside. **Radiation leak leads to estimated 240 cases of cancer**

4 Tokaimura, Japan, 1999: Batch of highly-enriched uranium prepared by unqualified workers, triggering nuclear reaction. **Two workers killed – 100 workers and local residents treated for exposure to radiation**

Source: IAEA

Pictures: Getty Images, Associated Press